



The Lincoln Kinsman

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FIVE SHIPLEY SISTERS

THEIR DESCENDENTS AGREE THAT LUCY SHIPLEY HANKS WAS
LINCOLN'S MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER.

SEVERAL students of Abraham Lincoln have felt that a Halloween prank has been played on those interested in genealogy by introducing into the maternal line of the President the story of five Shipley sisters. One biographer said "Here I set up my guillotine, and serve as lord high executioner in a farewell service in honor of"—he then enumerates the Shipley sisters proscribed to die.

Some confusion as to the given and marriage names of these Shipley sisters has existed but their ghosts come back to emphatically deny this statement by the same author who set up the guillotine: "Mr. Shipley may have had five daughters, or even ten, five of them wise and five amateur genealogists, but thus far not a scrap of evidence has been advanced to prove that he had even one little ewe lamb of a daughter." Documentary evidence is now available to prove that Robert Shipley of Virginia did have at least five daughters and that these daughters married

men whose names are familiar to those who have studied the environments of Lincoln's mother.

Descendents of Naomi Shipley

Whether or not she might be called an amateur "genealogist," Mrs. C. S. H. Vawter, a great granddaughter of one of the Shipley sisters, was primarily responsible for the discovery of the papers proving the legal marriage of Lincoln's own parents. On February 20, 1874, there appeared in the *Louisville Courier*, a letter written by Mrs. Vawter from which these excerpts are made.

"Some time since there fell into my hands by chance an evening journal containing a letter to the *Louisville Commercial*, in which it was hinted that there had existed clouds in the public mind as to the marriage of Abraham Lincoln's mother and father. In the year 1859 I went to Springfield, Ky., to teach, and was in that same neighborhood when Lincoln received the nomination for President. On the announcement of

the news of the candidate all were on the *qui vive* to know who the stranger was, so unexpectedly launched on a perilous sea. A farmer remarked that he should not be surprised if this was the son of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, who were married at the home of Uncle Frank Berry. In a short time this supposition of the farmer was confirmed by the announcement of the father's name. A few days later I visited an aged lady, named Mrs. Litsey, who interested me much by giving me a description of the wedding of the father and mother of the new candidate, she having been a friend of the bride and present at the marriage.

"In 1866, after the liberation of four million slaves had made the name of Abraham Lincoln memorable, I was again in the neighborhood and visited the old home, in which were celebrated the nuptials above referred to . . . The official record of this marriage will probably be found at Springfield.

"As I remember the story of Nancy Hanks, it ran thus: Her mother's name before marriage was Shipley, and one of her sisters married a Mr. Berry; another sister married Robert Mitchell, who also came to Kentucky about the year 1780. While on the journey the Mitchells were attacked by the Indians and Mrs. Mitchell fatally wounded, and their only daughter, Sarah, a child eleven years old, was captured and carried into Michigan, where a squaw saved her life by hiding her behind a big log. Mr. Mitchell mounted his horse, and, accompanied by his friend, General Adair, went in search of his daughter, but was drowned in the Ohio River while attempting to cross it.

The sons of this father and mother were afterward scattered to different parts of the State.

"One of them, Daniel, settled in Washington County, on the Beech Fork, a few miles from Springfield, and near his two cousins, Frank and Ned Berry. To these cousins came Nancy Hanks, and the legend is that 'her cheerful disposition and active habits were a dower to those pioneers.' Soon after Mad Anthony Wayne's treaty with the Indians, in 1794 or 1795, the lost Sarah was returned to her friends, and lived in the home of her uncle, Richard Berry, with her cousins, Frank and Ned Berry and Nancy Hanks, until both girls were married. These girls were as intimate as sisters.

"Sarah Mitchell was a woman of a high order of talent. She married a Virginian, had many fine children, and retained until her death the greatest veneration for the memory of her cousin, whose name she gave to one of her daughters. Modesty has laid the impress of silence upon these relatives of a noble woman, but when the voice of calumny has presumed to sully her name, they hurl the accusation to the ground and proclaim her the beautiful character they had learned to love long before they knew that to her had been given an honored son.

"From one who has learned from saintly lips to admire her grandmother's cousin (Nancy Hanks)."

C. S. H. V.

There is before the editor of the *Lincoln Kinsman*, several letters written by Mrs. Vawter to Mrs. Caroline Hanks Hitchcock in 1895. One of them makes reference to the letter in

the *Louisville Courier* written in 1874 already submitted in part:

"Twenty-two years have elapsed since the letter, to which you refer was written in vindication of Nancy Hanks who was the cousin of my grandmother. When young they were intimate as sisters and members of their Uncle Richard Berry's home in Washington Co., Ky., until they were both married. My grandmother was married first, Nancy Hanks five or six years later. My grandmother retained until her death the greatest love for her cousin and that knowledge prompted the writing of the letter, which has resulted in the entire vindication of a noble woman and the untarnished fame of her honored son. My letter was written in 1873. In 1877 I visited Ky. and urged my Uncle Mitchell Thompson to have the old Court-house searched for the papers. At a later date he did go to Mr. Booker, Clerk of Washington Co. Springfield, the County Seat, and have the search made—which resulted in the finding of the papers. The establishment of the Legality of the marriage etc. Nancy Hanks mother's name before marriage was Shipley and she was a Virginian. There were I think Six Sisters in the Shipley family. But I only remember the names of the husbands of two, Richard Berry and Robert Mitchell, my Grand Father, and Mr. Hank's, Nancy's Father."

Mrs. Vawter was the daughter of Naomi Thompson and Achilles Vawter. Naomi was named for her grandmother Naomi Shipley who married Robert Mitchell. It was the child of Robert and Naomi Shipley Mitchell, named Sarah, who was the girlhood

playmate of Nancy Hanks and the grandmother of Mrs. Vawter.

Another descendent of Naomi Shipley, Squire Mitchell Thompson, has left a reminiscence which was printed in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* on January 5, 1881. He was interviewed by a reporter of the paper and said in part:

"My mother was a Mitchell, a first cousin of President Lincoln's mother, their mothers were Shipleys from North Carolina. My mother was captured when a girl in 1790 by the Indians, twenty-five miles beyond Crab Orchard at a place called Defeated Camp. Walter Caruth was leading the expedition. He had led parties into Kentucky before. The Indians rushed upon them with wild whoops and commenced tomahawking. Grandmother was struck down but Grandfather stood by with a spear and carried her into the Crab Orchard fort. She died next day . . . Mother was carried into Canada and remained in captivity five years with the Pottawatamies."

After Mr. Thompson had related in detail the story of his mother's exile with the Indians as a small child, he told of her making her home upon being rescued from the Red men with her Uncle Richard Berry. Mr. Thompson then said that "Nancy Hanks, Abraham Lincoln's mother, also went to live with Uncle Richard Berry, and Aunt Rachel, his wife, taught Nancy to spin and weave."

Certainly Mr. Thompson was not confused about the story of his own mother and her association with her cousin Nancy Hanks who lived in the same house with her. With such a tragic death associated with his

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grandmother, Naomi Shipley Mitchell, it is not strange that the details of the massacre in which his own mother had been captured, would be familiar to Mr. Thompson.

The editor of *Lincoln Kinsman* was fortunate in discovering several years ago, in the Durrett Collection of old Kentucky manuscripts in the University of Chicago, the interesting letter of Mary Mitchell, grandmother of the captive child Sarah and mother-in-law of Naomi Shipley Mitchell. The letter, addressed to Governor Isaac Shelby of Kentucky and carried to the Governor by William Mitchell, follows verbatim:

"Dear sir:

"You will perhaps think strange to receive a letter from a poor old woman who never had the least acquaintance with you, but sir when you hear my story, I am very sure you will pity at least if you can do no more for me.

"My request is in behalf of my grandchild who was taken prisoner by the Indians in the wilderness last fall two years, her name is Sally S. Mitchell daughter of Robert Mitchell, deceased. As you have frequent opportunity of writing Governor Blunt I beg of you to mention the matter

to him as he once promised to use his best endeavor to gain intelligence of her. Request him to write to you whether he has ever found anything certain about her or where she is and should that gentlemen write to you (as I hope he will please let me know by a line sent to Mr. Robert Caldwell from where I could soon get it) whether there is any news of my poor grandchild. I am now old and very frail and cannot rest contented without trying every method in my power for her redemption from captivity. I hope you will assist me all you can which favor will be thankfully acknowledged by

"Your most obedt. and hum'l servant

"Mary Mitchell

May 1st, 1785" 1793

The old Mitchell Bible, still extant, gives Naomi Shipley Mitchell's birth as of April 26, 1748, and the date of the birth of her first child, John, as of 1771.

It will be observed that up to the time Mrs. Vawter wrote the letter to the *Louisville Courier* in 1874, no documentary evidence of the marriage of Lincoln's parents was available. On July 26, 1873, John G. Nicolay, apparently at the request of Robert Lincoln, who he was then visiting, wrote to Charles Friend of Hodgenville, Kentucky, asking for information about the marriage of Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln but nothing but further confusion resulted from the inquiry. It must be admitted that the most valuable discovery with reference to Lincoln's maternal ancestors was made through the insistence of Mrs. Vawter that the marriage papers would be found in Washington County. There they

were found by the county clerk, Mr. Booker. Through Mrs. Vawter efforts, Lincoln's parents were given a respectable place in society.

A great-great-grandson of Naomi Shipley who lives in Kentucky states:

"Our father's grandmother was Sarah Mitchell . . . She was taken a captive at the age of five years and remained with the Indians until she was recovered by her Uncle Richard Berry. My second name is Berry in honor of that man. Sarah Mitchell and Nancy Hanks were first cousins, both orphans, and were reared and educated by the said Uncle Richard Berry. These two girls grew up together, went to school together, and became known as sister-cousins. When Nancy Hanks was married Richard Berry signed the marriage bond, and it along with the return of the minister who performed the marriage ceremony can now be seen sealed in a glass case in the clerk's office at Springfield. At the marriage Sarah Mitchell was the bridesmaid."

Descendents of Margaret Shipley

At the time Robert Shipley's daughters were marrying, he and his wife Rachel and some of the children moved from Virginia to North Carolina. They settled in Mecklenburg County on the Catawba River. Some of the descendents of the Shipleys still live in North Carolina and there is no question in their minds about their relation to the Nancy Hanks who married Thomas Lincoln.

Miss Mary Ellen Armstrong, a great-granddaughter of Margaret Shipley, has given the editor of the *Lincoln Kinsman* this bit of reminiscence:

"Margaret Shipley, my great

grandmother, first married Robert Sloan who was killed or died in the Revolutionary War. She married Matthew Armstrong shortly after the Revolution. Abraham Lincoln's grandmother was a Shipley and married a Hanks. Her daughter, Nancy Hanks, went to relatives in Kentucky and married a Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln's grandmother and my great-grandmother, Margrate Shipley were sisters."

"The above information is from Matthew Armstrong and his wife Margrate Shipley, to their son Matthew Armstrong; from Matthew Armstrong, Jr., to his granddaughter Clarissa Armstrong, from whom I wrote it down verbatim from dictation.

"The Armstrongs are of Scotch descent. They neither add to nor take away.

"The Armstrongs and Shipleys lived in N. C. Unfortunately the old county court house and its records were burned."

Descendents of Ann Shipley

From many different sources there has come information about the family of Ann Shipley who married David McCord and some recent work has been done in tracing the history of this interesting family. Mrs. Scott C. Hanna, the wife of a great-great-grandson of Ann Shipley has been successful in discovering several court documents which locate the family in its early migration to Kentucky and Indiana. She writes:

"It was Mr. Hanna's direct ancestor, his grandmother's father, James McCord, youngest child of David and Ann Shipley, born April 5, 1785, Mecklenburg Co., N. C. who was directed in his father, David McCord's

will, to receive either 'Manor house or the plantation (near Boones Fort) and care for his mother until her death.' She died in 1828 age 82 yrs. and her son James & wife Margaret Summers McCord & children then went to Parkes Co. Ind. where record of them is to be found. David McCord was 72 yrs at his death—his will was proved Monday, Jan. 5, 1818 & is recorded Will Book B—p. 425—Madison Co. Court Records at Richmond Ky. My records give David McCord born 1745 d. 1818. My records give Ann Shipley McCord born 1746 d. 1828."

Mr. R. C. Simpson, a descendant of Ann Shipley McCord comments, "I used to hear my grandmother say that she was a cousin (2nd cousin I think) to Nancy Hanks, or the President, but think it was second cousin of Nancy Hanks, but don't remember just how the relationship was. My grandmother was Jane Caldwell McCord (married Archibald Simpson) and I find her grandfather was David McCord (b. between 1734 & 1744; & 1806 or 1816) whose wife was Ann Shipley, (about 1740-1828). Their eldest son was born on Oct. 5, 1766.

Another descendant of Ann Shipley gives this reminiscence:

"Robert Shipley's daughter, Ann, married David McCord; Margaret married Robert Mitchell. Rachel married Richard Berry; and Lucy is said to have married James Hanks, who became the father of Nancy Hanks, the president's mother."

The Descendents of Lucy Shipley

Abraham Lincoln's mother died when he was but nine years of age and it is not likely that he ever heard very much about her family,

especially if she was an only daughter and her mother had married again into another family. It is evident that Nancy Hanks' own father died at too early a period for her to remember him and inasmuch as Nancy was brought up in the home of her Aunt Rachel, the Hanks background would be rather dim even in the memory of Lincoln's mother.

There is nothing strange about the brevity with which Lincoln passed over his maternal ancestry when he made the simple statement "My mother who died in my tenth year was of a family of the name of Hanks." There is no occasion whatever, to read into these brief words, family skeletons, illicit relations, and a feeling of shame that he should have descended from such worthless poor white trash as the Hankses were erroneously described. This depreciation of Lincoln's maternal ancestry is the result of too many assumptions without factual evidence.

The only possible source of finding out what direct descendents of Lucy Shipley Hanks Sparrow have had to say with reference to her identity is through the Sparrow relatives. Here again we are handicapped as it would not appear that the offspring of Henry and Lucy Sparrow would be much concerned about a previous marriage of Lucy. This one fact is certain, however, and it is admitted by Dr. W. E. Barton on page sixty-three, volume one, in his *Life of Lincoln*: "They (descendents of Henry and Lucy Sparrow) all know that their great or great-great or great-great-great grandfather married Lucy Hanks and that she had a daughter, Nancy Hanks, but they have never heard that there was any scandal

about it; they supposed that Lucy had been married before."

So all the descendents of Lucy Hanks Sparrow supposed that Lucy "had been married before" that she was a widow with a child Nancy, when she married Henry Sparrow. That is the unanimous testimony of the descendants of Lucy Shipley Hanks Sparrow. It does seem as if there had been any irregularity in the family, through extensive questioning, Dr. Barton would have found one Sparrow at least who had heard a rumor about the waywardness of their grandmother but apparently no such tradition existed in the Sparrow family.

Descendents of Rachel Shipley

The name of Richard Berry appears on the marriage bond of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks as the guardian of Nancy. This Richard Berry was the son of Richard and Rachel Shipley Berry and it was in the cabin of Rachel Berry that Nancy Hanks made her home.

The story of Nancy Hanks presence in the Berry home is told in an interview with Squire Mitchell Thompson, published in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* for September 11, 1895. According to the story told by Mr. Thompson and handed down to him by his mother. "In the Richard and Rachel Shipley Berry pioneer cabin room was made for Lucy Hanks, the third sister . . . Lucy Hanks married a man whose name she took while in Virginia and Nancy Hanks, the mother of President Lincoln, was the offspring."

Mr. Thompson, in referring to Lucy as the third sister was thinking of Mrs. Rachel Shipley Berry as

the first, his own grandmother, Naomi Shipley Mitchell as the second, and Lucy Shipley Hanks as the third. It does not seem improbable that Lucy as a widow would make her abode with a sister upon arriving in the wilderness and when Lucy married her second husband, it is not strange that Lucy, busy rearing a group of eight children which resulted from her second marriage, would allow her daughter Nancy to go and live with her older sister Rachel Berry whose own daughters were now grown and married.

There passed away at Williamsburg, Missouri, in 1913, at ninety-five years of age, Captain Robert M. Berry. He was born in Kentucky in 1818, the very year that Lincoln's mother died in Indiana. He was an own son of Richard Berry, Jr., the guardian of Nancy Hanks. His death notice which appeared in the local paper carried this information.

"His (Captain Robert M. Berry's) father was a man of considerable wealth and while a resident of Kentucky reared Nancy Hanks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln, and at her wedding signed the marriage bond of her husband." Certainly a son of the man who was the guardian of Nancy Hanks should know whether or not his father was the guardian of a child who had been brought up in the same family into which he was born.

The school of historians who are still insistent on making Lincoln's mother an illegitimate child of an irresponsible wayward daughter of a certain Joseph Hanks, have no place for Richard Berry in the story relating to Lincoln's mother although they have had to accept the fact that Nan-

cy Hanks and Thomas Lincoln were married in the Berry cabin.

The name of Richard Berry as guardian on the marriage bond is dismissed as of no significance whatever, and the fact that the wedding occurred in the Berry cabin one author explains was due to the friendship of Mr. Richard Berry, Jr.'s wife with Nancy Hanks. This is a pure supposition with no evidence, whatever, to support it.

When it is known that the marriage papers of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks were discovered at the insistence of the relatives of the Ber-

ry family who looked upon Nancy Hanks as a kinswoman. When there are reminiscences available of those who attended the wedding and were well acquainted with the bride, and when the members of the Berry family themselves acknowledged this relationship, it should for all time settle the place of Nancy Hanks' residence at the time of her marriage, and the significance of Richard Berry serving as her guardian. The testimony of Robert M. Berry alone, should be sufficient evidence to establish the residence of Nancy Hanks in the home of his own father.

SHIPLEY FAMILY

First Generation

a. Adam, ?-1725

Howard, Lois

Second Generation

aa. Richard, ?-1725

Stevens, Susannah

ab. Adam, ?-?

——, Ruth

ac. Robert (1684-1763)

——, Elizabeth

ad. Peter, ?-1737

ae. Ketura, (1690)-?

Barnes, James

af. Lois, (1700)-?

Poole, Basil

Third Generation

aca. Charles, 1711-?

acb. Robert, 1713-?

Dorsey, Sarah

acc. Ruth, 1715-?

Hood, John

acd. Ketura, 1717-?

Welsh, Capt. Upton

ace. Elizabeth, 1818-?

Goldborough, Dr. Hawes

acf. Sarah, 1721-?

Gassaway, Nicholas

acg. Lois, 1723-?

ach. George, 1726-?

aci. William, 1729-?

Fourth Generation

acba. Robert, ?-?

Prewitt, Rachel

acbb. Rachel, ?-

Berry, Richard

acbc. Ann, 1746-1828

McCord, David

acbd. Naomi, 1748-1790

Mitchell, Robert

acbe. Margaret, ?-?

1. Sloan, Robert

2. Armstrong, Matthew

acbf. Lucy, ?-(1825)

1. Hanks, (James)

(Father of Nancy Hanks)

2. Sparrow, (Henry)

Fifth Generation

acdfa. Nancy, ?-1818

Lincoln, Thomas

(Parents of the President)